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SUBJECT: SOLIS, OTERO DISCUSS BILAT RELATIONS WITH BOLIVIAN FM

DERIVED FROM: DSCG 05-1 B, D

¶1. (C) Summary: Secretary of Labor Hilda Solis, U/S for Global Affairs Maria Otero, and Charge met with Foreign Minister David Choquehuanca and Vice Minister for Social Defense Felipe Caceres on January 21 and reiterated the USG's desire to improve bilateral relations. Choquehuanca thanked the delegation for their attendance, and said the GOB remains committed to concluding a framework agreement with the USG. He identified the issue of government-to-government assistance as the major sticking point, and proposed a high level meeting to advance the talks. Choquehuanca and Caceres reviewed GOB concerns regarding counternarcotics funding. Charge pledged to forward Choquehuanca's proposal to restart bilateral discussions, but requested a written GOB counterproposal on the assistance issue prior to further talks. U/S Otero reviewed the USG's role in Haiti aid and reconstruction efforts, emphasizing that the USG was working under the aegis of the UN, in coordination with other countries, and at the request of the Haitian government. End summary.

Delegation Meeting with FM Choquehuanca

¶2. (C) Labor Secretary Hilda Solis and U/S for Global Affairs Maria Otero arrived January 21 as members of a presidential delegation to attend President Evo Morales' inauguration ceremonies (septel). Sec. Solis, U/S Otero, Charge, and poloff (notetaker) met with FM Choquehuanca and Vice Minister Caceres at the Foreign Ministry on January 21. MFA Director of Bilateral Relations Jean Paul Guevara attended as notetaker.

¶3. (C) Solis opened the meeting with congratulations for Morales' successful re-election campaign. Solis noted she is a child of immigrants -- as is President Obama -- and that she appreciates the importance of improving bilateral ties. Solis cited ongoing Labor Department programs in Bolivia and the region to eliminate exploitation of child labor and increase educational opportunities for marginalized children as potential opportunities for increased cooperation.

Choquehuanca Focuses on Framework Talks

¶4. (C) Choquehuanca thanked Sec. Solis and U/S Otero for coming to Bolivia and underscored the importance of better bilateral ties based on "mutual respect." He stressed that the GOB wanted good relations with the United States, contrasting the crush of

photographers that appeared for the U.S. meeting with the one that appeared for his session with the Canadians, and reiterated GOB interest in resuming talks on a framework agreement. Choquehuanca said the second round of talks in Washington had made significant progress. Still, the GOB felt the USG position in follow-up technical discussions in November was a step backwards. Choquehuanca said the GOB found our proposed trade language basically acceptable. The principal sticking point was the issue of government-to government assistance.

¶ 15. (C) Choquehuanca proposed a "high level" meeting to evaluate progress, review outstanding issues, and identify a way forward. He said the framework agreement should establish general principles and leave the details to working groups or sub-agreements. Most important, he said, was to quickly devise a plan that both sides could agree to. If a high level meeting were successful, Choquehuanca added, GOB representatives could travel to Washington to finalize the deal. He joked, however, that this time we would not make the mistake of publicly setting a date for signing an accord. (Note: Last October, both sides publicly committed to trying to reach an agreement by the end of November. End note.)

¶ 16. (C) U/S Otero relayed to Choquehuanca the Secretary's continued desire to realize an agreement. Otero agreed that a framework agreement did not need to go into great detail on all areas, but stressed that the US faces serious constraints on the government-to-government assistance issue. She noted the many areas in which we already have agreement, and suggested that we might work together to address GOB concerns in specific areas even in the absence of a framework agreement. Charge noted previous GOB commitments to provide us written alternative language on the government-to-government issue, and said the provision of such language prior to any new talks would facilitate further progress.

Concerns Over Narcotrafficking Funds

¶ 17. (C) Choquehuanca said the GOB appreciated U.S. assistance in the fight against narcotrafficking, which he called a "scourge of mankind." The GOB was disappointed by the recent cut in U.S. assistance from \$26 to \$22 million, but understood that this was the U.S. prerogative. Still, Choquehuanca questioned whether the proposed distribution of funds outlined in the amendment to the Letter of Agreement (LOA) would produce the best results. He suggested that if the GOB were given greater flexibility in handling the funding, its counternarcotics efforts would be more successful.

¶ 18. (C) Vice Minister Caceres said that with a growing foreign narcotrafficking presence, especially Colombians, the GOB needed increased flexibility in spending anti-narcotics funding. Caceres pledged that the GOB was ready to fight narcotrafficking "from the heart," noting President Morales' instruction to eradicate more than 7,000 hectares of coca in 2010 and to halt the expansion of coca planting into new parts of the Yungas valley area. He decried pervasive corruption among prosecutors and judges, noting that narcotaffickers detained by the police are frequently released only hours later, and said funding for the judiciary might be better used for police interdiction units.

¶ 19. (C) U/S Otero said appropriations were determined by the U.S. Congress, noting that constant GOB rhetorical attacks on the U.S. made it difficult to sustain congressional support for funding. Charge proposed a meeting with Caceres the week of January 25 to discuss his specific concerns, but said that significant changes to the LOA could result in disbursement delays. This, in turn, would affect our capacity to support GOB plans to initiate eradication on January 25. He noted that any information the GOB could share on its CN funding would enable us to better coordinate our activities and maximize results. Charge also proposed meeting with other ambassadors to facilitate a multilateral counternarcotics effort, to which Caceres and Choquehuanca readily assented.

US Involvement in Haiti Reconstruction Efforts

¶ 110. (C) U/S Otero reviewed the USG's role in Haiti reconstruction efforts. Otero stated that she was personally involved in coordinating the US response and that Secretary Clinton had made

great efforts to speed and increase our assistance in the relief effort. Our presence, Otero underlined, was wholly at the request of the Haitian government and our efforts were coordinated with the United Nations, Brazil, and the Europeans. Charge added that we were in no way trying to supplant the role of the UN. Choquehuanca said foreign ministers of the ALBA countries would meet in Caracas on January 24 to discuss assistance to Haiti, noting that the information provided by U/S Otero would be useful.

¶11. (C) In a press conference on January 22, Choquehuanca said the GOB appreciated the US "gesture" in sending such a senior delegation to President Morales' inauguration. He briefly reviewed the history of the framework agreement talks, and reiterated GOB interest in resuming talks on the accord.

¶12. (C) Neither Sec. Solis nor U/S Otero cleared on this cable.

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